

# Two dirges from central Greece

Translated by PETER CONSTANTINE

- I. You are leaving and with you leave my eyes.  
Where are you going, my solace?  
Where are you going, key to my being,  
pillar of my heart?

Where you will go my child  
to answer the serpent's call  
remember your mother  
and come back.

In the netherworld where you are going  
be careful not to err  
by drinking the waters of oblivion  
and forgetting us.

Take with you some of our violets  
and some marjoram  
so you will be quick to return  
to your forsaken mother!

The wounds that death inflicts  
cannot be remedied by friends  
cannot be cured by doctors  
cannot be calmed by saints.

II. Death is a sinner  
    a sinner and a thief.  
He sat and watched  
    from the window  
A shepherd descend  
    from a high ridge.  
—Greetings to you, shepherd.  
—Greetings, young man.  
—Come, shepherd, let us go,  
    let us go far away  
Where vultures do not circle  
    and birds do not sing.  
I am the Son of the black earth,  
    of cobwebbed stones.  
They call me Death  
And all shiver when  
    they hear my name.  
No soul do I give back  
    without sickness and disease.  
Come, let us fight  
    on the marble threshing floor.  
And Death was angered.  
    The earth shook,  
And he grabbed the youth by the hair  
    and pulled out his sword.  
—Death, let me go,  
    don't take me today.  
My sheep are unshorn  
    And cheese lies on the scales.  
I have children who are small  
    and a wife who is young.  
—The sheep will be shorn  
    And cheese can be weighed,  
Your children will grow  
    and your widow can be...  
Come, shepherd, let us go.